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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 002923

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2016
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [GR](#) [NATO](#)
SUBJECT: AEGEAN: TURKISH AND GREEK WARPLANES COLLIDE

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A Greek F16 and Turkish F16 collided in midair in international waters near the Greek island of Karpatos at mid-day May 23. The Turkish pilot was rescued; it appears the Greek pilot died. Turkish FonMin Gul called Greek FonMin Bokayannis to express regret over the incident and condolences for the loss of the pilot; the Turkish and Greek CHODs have apparently also spoken. A Turkish MFA statement says that both countries do not want the incident to affect bilateral relations. We believe Turkey is seeking to keep this incident in perspective and not allow it to escalate. End summary.

¶2. (U) According to a statement by the Turkish military, a Turkish F16 and a Greek F16 collided in the Aegean Sea on May ¶23. The statement claims that Turkish F16s on a routine training mission 35 miles south of Rhodes were intercepted by Greek warplanes at 12:48 Turkish time (Zulu plus three), and that during this incident a Greek and Turkish plane collided, with both falling to the sea. The statement says that the Turkish pilot, First Lieutenant Halil Ibrahim Ozdemir, was rescued.

¶3. (U) Both the Greek and Turkish press have been reporting widely on the incident. It is not clear as of this writing whether the Turkish pilot has been rescued by Turkish or Greek authorities. Ominously, there are no reports of any rescue of the Greek pilot, and the press is reporting that he is presumed to be dead.

¶4. (C) NATO Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) Six (located in Eskisehir, Turkey) reported that the collision took place 15 miles south-southeast of Karpatos Island, which would place the site of the collision in international airspace.

¶5. (C) DCM called MFA Undersecretary Ali Tuygan, who reported that FonMin Gul had just spoken to Greek FonMin Bakoyannis to express regret for the incident and condolences for the apparent loss of life of the Greek pilot. Tuygan also confirmed media reports that the Turkish CHOD, GEN Hilmi Ozkok, had been in touch with his Greek counterpart. Tuygan told us that both sides are working to calm the situation and avoid escalation. He said the Turkish MFA would release a statement (see text para. 6). DCM urged that the statement be worded so as to calm the public reaction and avoid escalation of tensions. (COMMENT: We believe the statement should do so. END COMMENT.)

¶6. (U) MFA released the following statement COB May 23
(informal embassy translation):

BEGIN TEXT

Today (May 23) at around noon a Turkish and a Greek plane collided in international airspace and crashed approximately 35 miles south of Rhodes.

After the incident our pilot was rescued and it was learned with regret that the Greek pilot has lost his life.

Immediately after the incident, Acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mr. Abdullah Gul called Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis and expressed our sorrow and conveyed condolences.

During the conversation, both ministers agreed that the incident should be investigated fully and thoroughly and it should not affect bilateral relations.

END TEXT

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